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ABSTRACT

This profile in outline form discusses the English language teaching situation in the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking areas of Belgium. The situation in the Dutch-speaking region, which includes Flanders and Brussels (the latter having both Dutch and French as official languages), is described in terms of the extent of English instruction available to elementary and secondary students and adults, curriculum, English for Special Purposes, the teaching cadre and teacher training, teaching materials, the teaching of English outside the educational system, and British support for the teaching of English. The post-primary educational system of Wallonia (the French-speaking region) is described, and the English program within this system is briefly discussed, including consideration of the teaching staff and use of audiovisual materials. The program at one particular high-school, Athene Royal Liege, is outlined. (CLK)

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ENGLISH TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

Country: BELGIUM
(Dutch speaking)

October 1976

1. Role of English

Belgium is divided into three major regions: Flanders (Dutch-speaking), Wallonia (French speaking) and the Brussels agglomeration (with both Dutch and French as official languages). Additionally there is a small region where the official language is German. In the linguistic frontier regions, complex arrangements exist for the protection of the educational rights of linguistic minorities.

In these conditions English often has to be taught as a third rather than a second language. Nevertheless, Belgium, and more particularly Brussels, is the headquarters of so many English-using multinational enterprises, not to mention NATO and the European Commission, that the presence of English in these commercial, political and military areas seems to be becoming all-pervasive.

Commercial enterprises find it increasingly necessary to provide linguistic training in English for their employees. In the language training programme of the European Commission, English holds pride of place. Language schools providing lessons in English for adults ply a prosperous trade.

The schools are slowly but surely producing the required response to this increased need for English, the stimulus often coming as much through parental pressure as through legislation. In face of the requirement for many Belgians, particularly those working in the capital, to be bilingual in Dutch and French, the level of attainment in English commonly encountered betokens a strong motivation.

2. English within the Educational System

The educational system in both Flanders and Wallonia is more or less as set out in the earlier Profile (attached). Each region, however, has since 1970 had its own Ministry of Education, with each its own Minister. What follows refers to Flanders. (My predecessor's comments on English within the educational system of Wallonia may, I think, remain in toto, except for the names of personalities - eg Mr Lemaire, who has now retired.)

2.1(i) Apart from a few local experiments with children aged from 10 upwards, no English is as yet taught in primary schools, though there has been demand for this from the Flemish Association of Teachers of English.

(ii) At secondary level, English as L2 has 5 50-minute periods per week in the first year, diminishing gradually to 4, 3 or 2 periods per week, depending on the composition of the programme being followed by the pupil. This course starts at the age of 12 and continues until the age of 18. When English is L3, there are only 2 periods per week.

2.2 No distinction is made between language and literature. Literature teaching in schools is in fact rather limited in scope, being confined to the top classes of the more academic type of school.

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2.3 There is no public examination, as such. Rather there is continuous assessment throughout the course, supported during the last two years by twice-yearly tests.

2.4 Though English is not a compulsory requirement for advancement within the educational system (no subject is compulsory), it is widely understood that an absence of it will result in severe limitation on career or further educational prospects, especially in the sciences.

2.5 The responsibility for the formulation of the teaching programme lies with the Curriculum, which consists of three specialist Inspectors of English plus two teachers. An advisory board prescribes a list of teaching materials. From this rather wide list, teachers are free to choose, but they are, in the state schools (other than technical schools) not allowed to stray outside the list. British publishers are advised to submit ELT publications, which they hope to sell in Belgium, to this board, for their approval, so that there is no question of any book being anywhere excluded (Verbeteringsrat, 138 Rue Royale, 1030 Brussels).

2.6 The responsibilities of the three Inspectors are divided on both a geographical and a subject basis. The geographical areas are (i) West Flanders and Brabant, (ii) East Flanders and parts of Antwerp, (iii) Remainder of Antwerp, Turnhout, Brechelen, Limburg and military schools in Germany.

2.7 The secondary technical schools have within their walls a great deal of teaching of English for special purposes. But all kinds of specially-directed teaching are carried out on the previously-laid foundations of a general course.

2.8 Government provision for adult learning of English is made through the Ouderwigs voor Sociale Promotic. Here, English is taught at 3 levels; elementary, intermediate and advanced.

3. Teaching Cadre

3.1 Teachers of English are trained either at the "nornaalschool" (teacher training college) or at the university. Those trained at the first are called "regenten" and are qualified to teach pupils between 12 and 14. University graduates (licentiaaten) teach at the higher levels.

3.2 There are two professional organisations for teachers, one is the Flemish Association of Teachers of English (based in Antwerp) and there is a more recent association of francophone teachers of English based in Charleroi.

4. Teaching Materials

Generally speaking, schools are adequately provided. Teachers show great keenness to use the best and latest books and other material available. There are no official local projects of any kind. The field is left entirely to private enterprise.

5. English outside the Educational System

There are a great many commercial language schools, particularly in Brussels. These cater both for individuals and for special groups of various kinds. One British school, International Language Centre, has, with the support of a number of ARELS schools, just opened in Brussels.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

Direct British interest is confined to the long-standing guarantee by the Council of a contract university teacher of English in Antwerp University (Mr Conlon).

The Council supports the activities of the teachers' organisations, collaborates with the English inspectors, provides book exhibitions (promoting British teaching materials), advises, through its resource centre, on choice of materials. Such advice is given both to individuals and to institutions. Lectures on ELT and other subjects are given to both students and teachers, as occasions arise. Contact is maintained with university departments of English and Applied Linguistics.

Specialist visits in the fields of both language and literature are arranged by the Council. Two scholarships per year are provided in the ELT field, provided there are applicants of an adequate standard, and there are also opportunities for teachers in the ELT field to go for shorter study periods also.

British teaching materials are very extensively used at all levels.

Though the Council itself does no direct teaching, it now has a wide network of contacts among English teachers in Belgium and is able, to a large extent, to influence standards.

General Statement

Since, because of competition from the second national language (either French or Dutch), English is by no means invariably taught as the first foreign language, the official provision for its learning must sometimes fail to satisfy the very evident need for a knowledge of this language. There hence arises a strong demand (not so much noticed in neighbouring Netherlands, with its one national language) by adults for facilities for learning English both at home and in Britain.

It is to be hoped that the current ARELS-supported ILC venture into direct teaching in Brussels represents the beginning of something more considerable. The need and interest are certainly there.

British support for English teaching is required, however, not only at this adult level, but also through the channel of the educational system, where much can be done to remedy its limitations by means of collaboration in the fields of both pre-service and in-service training. To this end, British support for work in university departments concerned with the training of teachers of English, teacher-training colleges' English departments and for the activities of the specialist inspectorates of English in the secondary schools will always prove fruitful.

1

EDUCATION AND TEACHING OF ENGLISH (STATE SYSTEM)
French-speaking

1. General

1.1 School-leaving age is 14. Primary education is 6 years (6 to 12), with 2 years in 'Observation' (to 14), although a large number of pupils stay on till 16.

1.2 There are two educational systems running concurrently: the old (the Athènes and Lycées) and le système renové, the latter system to eventually replace the old throughout French-speaking Belgium. The ratio at the moment is 50:50.

1.3 Originally the Athènes were for Boys and the Lycées for Girls. The Athènes are becoming Mixed Schools.

2. Post-Primary (Système Renové)

2.1 This consists of 6 years of Secondary education which are divided into:

Observation	(2 years) - ages	12 - 14
Orientation	(2 years) -	14 - 16
Détermination	(2 years) -	16 - 18

2.2 In the Observation, all pupils follow the same courses and syllabuses (ie all courses are 'common core').

2.3 In the Orientation there is a division:

General Studies (Latin, Maths, etc)

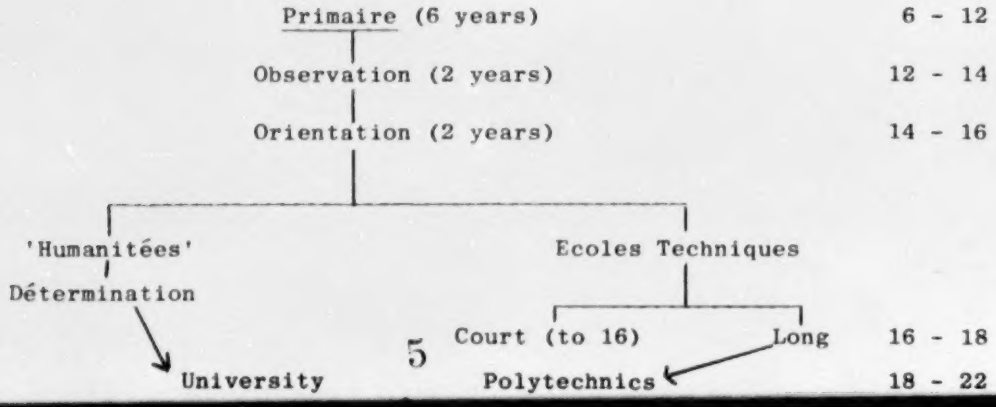
Vocational Studies (technical schools) which are further subdivided into:

Court (up to 16) and Long (up to 'Polytechnic').

The technical schools are 'Comprehensive' in the sense that even Latin is taught.

2.4 In the Détermination, the pupils select their future specialisms, ie the subject or group of subjects they will pursue in Higher Studies.

2.5 Diagrammatically:



3. Post-Primary (Old System)

In the Athènes and Lycées there is the 2-year Observation period, after which the pupil proceeds either to the Classique or to the Moderne. Traditionally the system feeds the Universities.

4. Teacher-Training

Teachers for Secondary Schools are either Régents or Licenciés (no recyclage scheme to date, but a Sèvres connection):

Régents for the lower forms of Secondary. 2 years course in the Ecole Normale Moyenne after finishing their Secondary education;

Licenciés (agrégés) for the middle and upper forms. 4 years at University, including agrégation.

5. Inspectorate

5.1 There are two areas: Liège and Charleroi (arrondissement); and Malmédy, Luxembourg Province, Comignes. There are 12 Inspectors in the area, 3 being for the Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish) and 9 for the Germanic languages (English, German, Dutch).

5.2 In the Liège area there is no central office for Inspectors, and they operate from home, although an office is projected.

6. The Foreign Language Programme

6.1 Excluding Russian, there are 5 foreign languages in demand - English, German, Dutch, Italian and Spanish. We can refer to them as FL1, FL2, FL3 ... according to whether the language is first, second, etc. choice.

6.2 FL1 is taught 4 periods per week (from year one of the Secondary cycle), each period 50 minutes, but this could increase to 6 periods in the sixth forms (after Détermination period). One FL is compulsory; FL2 etc are optional, but pupils with a penchant for languages can cause timetable and curricula problems.

6.3 For example in Form III (during 'Orientation') a pupil chooses an FL2 (ie in addition to FL1). This could lead to the FL1 being forced down to 3 periods per week, or even 2. Anyone choosing FL2 is entitled to 4 periods weekly (as for FL1) and even 6 periods in Détermination. There is a feeling that too many FLs are taught - eg in the Athène Royale, Liège I. A further complication arises when a pupil with FL1 and FL2, chooses an FL3 in say Form IV.

7. The English Programme

7.1 English is a foreign language on par with the others, but it is estimated that 50% of the pupils elect English as FL1.

7.2 The demand for English is increasing everywhere. A typical case is the Athène Royale in Liège. Figures given by the Proviseur (Deputy to the Préfet) for 1973/74 in respect of new entrants to Form I are:

at age 12: 20 elected German as FL1

42 elected Dutch as FL1

168 elected English as FL1

230 new entrants

with French, of course, being L1 (mother tongue).

7.3 In the Système Rènové, the following weekly periods apply:

4 4 4 4 6 6

for the 6 years of Secondary. Pupils taking 6 periods in the later years are those taking up English at University. In the Athène Royale, Liège, for instance, 50% take English in the sixth forms. Towards the frontiers in the East more tend to take Dutch and/or German.

7.4 There are no language laboratories in schools - the argument being that the complex language options would make it very expensive to run (eg purchase of soft ware). But otherwise schools are well equipped audio-visually.

7.5 Of about 7,000 teachers in the area, about 2,000 are teachers of languages. In the lower forms one teacher could take more than one language (or subject) but in the middle and upper forms, teachers specialise in one language where the demand is great (as for English).

8. Athène Royal Liège I, rue des Clarisses

8.1 The Préfet's ('Headmaster') Proviseur (Deputy) is generally responsible for discipline, with the Headmaster being 'Director of Studies'.

8.2 Student population is 1,150. There are 9 teachers of English.

8.3 Each of the lower forms is equipped with a tape-recorder and filmstrip projector; the middle forms have recorders only. The textbook in use is 'Passport to English' (Didier) Part I for forms I and II, Part II for forms III and IV. At Easter, Unit 5 of Part II had been reached - this indicates the need for transitional lessons to bridge the wide gap between the two parts. Schools have free choice in the use of textbooks.

8.4 A scheme operates between Belgium and the UK whereby pupils stay en famille during Easter (with some English pupils actually attending schools here for a week, having a longer Easter). It is organised by: La Jeunesse Belge à l'Etranger, rue d'Egmont, 11 Brussels; founded by Closset 30 years ago (12 November 1945).

9. Universities

9.1 The following are French-medium Universities: Liège, Louvain-la-Neuve, Bruxelles, Mons; with a Faculty in Namur.